

Children better prepared for school if their parents read aloud to them

13 May 2008

Young children whose parents read aloud to them have better language and literacy skills when they go to school, according to a review published online ahead of print in the *Archives of Disease in Childhood*.

Children who have been read aloud to are also more likely to develop a love of reading, which can be even more important than the head start in language and literacy. And the advantages they gain persist, with children who start out as poor readers in their first year of school likely to remain so.

In addition, describing pictures in the book, explaining the meaning of the story, and encouraging the child to talk about what has been read to them and to ask questions can improve their understanding of the world and their social skills.

The review brings together a wide range of published research on the benefits of reading aloud to children. It also includes evidence that middle class parents are more likely to read to their children than poorer families.

The authors explain that the style of reading has more impact on children's early language and literacy development than the frequency of reading aloud. Middle class parents tend to use a more interactive style, making connections to the child's own experience or real world, explaining new words and the motivations of the characters, while working class parents tend to focus more on labelling and describing pictures. These differences in reading styles can impact on children's development of language and literacy-related skills.

The Reach Out and Read programme in Boston has improved the language skills of children in low income families by increasing the proportion of parents reading to their children.

The programme provides books and advice to the parents about the importance of reading aloud. Parents who have been given books were four times more likely to say they had looked at books with their children or that looking at books was one of their child's favourite activities, and twice as likely to read aloud to their children at least three times a week.

Source: British Medical Journal

APA citation: Children better prepared for school if their parents read aloud to them (2008, May 13) retrieved 15 October 2019 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-05-children-school-parents-aloud.html>

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